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**Items for information: environmental accounting**

## Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting

### Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with the request of the Statistical Commission at its thirty-eighth session,\*\* the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting. The report describes the progress of work of the Committee of Experts, including the current status of the project management framework for the revision of the *Handbook of National Accounting: Integrated Environmental-Economic Accounting 2003*; presents the implementation strategy for the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting for Water; and reports on the progress of phase II of the Global Assessment of Environment Statistics and Environmental-Economic Accounting. The Commission is requested to take note of the report.

\* E/CN.3/2008/1.

\*\* See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2007, Supplement No. 4 (E/2007/24)*, chap. I.A.

## Report of the Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting

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## I. Introduction

1. At its thirty-eighth session, the Statistical Commission:

(a) Commended the work of the Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting and stressed the importance of the work of the Committee in elevating the level of the *Handbook of National Accounting: Integrated Environmental-Economic Accounting 2003* to that of an international statistical standard based on an agreed issues list and taking into consideration consistency with the revision of the *System of National Accounts, 1993* and other revised macroeconomic standards;

(b) Adopted part I of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting for Water as an interim international statistical standard, recognizing significant demand from the users' community, and encouraged its implementation in countries;

(c) Requested that the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting for Water be re-evaluated by the Commission at the time the revised *Handbook of National Accounting: Integrated Environmental-Economic Accounting* is submitted to the Commission for adoption as an international statistical standard;

(d) Requested the United Nations Statistics Division to develop and submit to the next Statistical Commission an implementation strategy for the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting for Water, taking into account the fact that countries were at different stages of development of environment statistics and environmental-economic accounting;

(e) Called upon countries and international agencies to allocate sufficient resources to the revision of the *Handbook of National Accounting: Integrated Environmental-Economic Accounting 2003* in their work programme in view of the urgent need for that revision;

(f) Requested the Committee of Experts to develop and submit to the next Statistical Commission a project management framework for the revision of the *Handbook of National Accounting: Integrated Environmental-Economic Accounting, 2003* and to report on progress;

(g) Called upon the Committee of Experts to continue, within its mandate, to coordinate with the city groups and other expert groups working in environmental-economic accounting and related statistics;

(h) Encouraged the United Nations Statistics Division and the Committee of Experts to continue to organize user-producer conferences in order to build on the success of the User-Producer Conference on Water Accounting for Integrated Water Resource Management;

(i) Took note of the results of phase I of the Global Assessment of Environment Statistics and Environmental-Economic Accounting, confirmed its application for assessing the current and planned scope of implementation of the *Handbook of National Accounting: Integrated Environmental-Economic Accounting* in countries and welcomed phase II of the Global Assessment in 2007, with a focus on the specific subject areas identified by countries in phase I.

2. Section II below provides an overview of the progress of work of the Committee, in particular concerning the revision of the *Handbook of National*

*Accounting: Integrated Environmental-Economic Accounting 2003*, commonly referred to as SEEA-2003, including the project management framework and the coordination, within the Committee's mandate, of the various groups working on environmental-economic accounting and related statistics; the progress of work of the phase II of the Global Assessment of Environment Statistics and Environmental-Economic Accounting on specific subject areas; and the strategy for the implementation of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting for Water (SEEAW).

## **II. Progress of work of the Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting**

3. At its second meeting, held in New York on 5 and 6 July 2007, the Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting discussed the revision of SEEA-2003, including issues on the structure of the revised SEEA-2003, the list of issues in the research agenda and issues that required harmonization. It also discussed the project management framework for the revision of SEEA-2003, the Global Assessment of Environment Statistics and Environmental-Economic Accounting and the implementation strategy for SEEAW. These topics are discussed in further detail below.

### **A. Revision of SEEA-2003**

4. The Committee of Experts agreed with the list of issues for the research agenda of the revision of SEEA-2003 as presented by the London Group on Environmental Accounting. A complete list of issues will be presented in a background document to the Statistical Commission at its thirty-ninth session. Further, the Committee endorsed the recommendations of the London Group on splitting resource rent into income and depletion components and the treatment of mineral exploration.

5. The Committee of Experts agreed, upon the recommendation of the London Group, with structuring the revised SEEA-2003 in three parts: part I, Statistical standard; part II, Non-standard accounts; and part III, Applications. It also agreed that: (a) the discussion on indicators should be limited to part III, Applications; and (b) country examples and compilation issues should be excluded from the revised SEEA.

#### **1. Harmonization issues**

6. The Committee of Experts singled out those issues that require coordination between city groups and other expert groups or that require special attention because of the difficulty of finding widely acceptable solutions. These include issues related to energy accounts, material flow accounts as well as the valuation of degradation and are discussed separately below.

##### **(a) Energy accounts**

7. The Committee of Experts considered energy accounts as a mature subject matter to be elevated to the level of an international statistical standard. It reaffirmed that energy accounts should constitute an important component of the

standard SEEA. The Committee urged that work on the standardization of concepts, definitions and classifications for energy accounts should start expediently. It requested the United Nations Statistics Division, the London Group on Environmental Accounting and the Oslo Group on Energy Statistics to coordinate their activities closely in order to avoid duplication of work and to ensure the consistency of energy accounts and statistics.

8. The Committee of Experts welcomed the proposal by the United Nations Statistics Division to standardize energy accounts through the preparation of a document on energy accounts. The document would cover all the aspects of energy accounts — flows and stocks, in physical and monetary terms — and present a set of standard tables to be included in the revised SEEA-2003. The Division will take the lead in developing the document in consultation with the London Group and the Oslo Group.

**(b) Material flow accounts**

9. The Committee of Experts discussed at its last meeting a paper prepared by the Federal Statistical Office, Germany, and Statistics Denmark presenting the conceptual differences between the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Guidance Manual on Material Flow Accounts and SEEA and suggested a way forward to harmonize the two approaches. The paper identified three issues for harmonization: (a) terminology; (b) economy-wide material flow accounts; and (c) structure of the OECD Manual. The Committee agreed with the recommendations presented in the paper and stressed the importance of harmonizing the OECD Manual on Material Flow Accounts with the concepts of SEEA.

10. The Committee of Experts also recommended: (a) the preparation of a document, SEEA-Material Flow Accounts, building on the OECD Guidance Manual, but fully harmonized with the concepts of SEEA; and (b) the submission of SEEA-Material Flow Accounts document to the Statistical Commission for its adoption. It requested the United Nations Statistics Division, OECD and Eurostat to cooperate in that regard and to jointly publish SEEA-Material Flow Accounts document.

11. Following the recommendation of the Committee of Experts, the United Nations Statistics Division, OECD and Eurostat agreed to proceed with the drafting of the new SEEA-Material Flow Accounts document and the Division appointed a consultant to draft the document. An elaboration of the issues of harmonization will be discussed at the next London Group meeting in December 2007. The draft of SEEA-Material Flow Accounts document is expected to be discussed at the next Committee meeting in the second quarter of 2008 and, upon recommendation of the Committee, it will be submitted to the Statistical Commission for adoption.

**(c) Valuation of degradation**

12. Valuation of degradation remains one of the most controversial issues in the revision process of SEEA-2003. The Committee of Experts agreed that because of its policy relevance, valuation of degradation should be included in the revised SEEA. However, as the methodologies are not well developed and lack widespread recognition, the valuation of degradation will be addressed in part II of SEEA. A sub-group working on issues related to the valuation of degradation is in the process of being established.

## **2. Project management framework**

13. The Committee of Experts discussed a proposal for the project management framework for the revision of SEEA-2003. The main thrust of the project management framework is to highlight the elements and phases of the revision of SEEA-2003 in order to ensure smooth and transparent process that has broad support in the international statistical community and beyond. National statistical organizations need to be engaged and consulted in all phases of the project. The consultation process is an important component of the work programme and calls for the active involvement of national, regional and international organizations.

14. The project management framework comprises four parts: (a) criteria for inclusion of issues in the research agenda; (b) the governance arrangements, including roles and responsibilities of all groups/organizations involved; (c) the decision-making process and coordination among the different groups involved; and (d) the outline of the work programme, including deliverables, timetable and finance. A summary of the proposal of the project management framework is presented below and the detailed report will be presented in a background document at the thirty-ninth session of the Statistical Commission.

### **(a) Criteria for inclusion of issues in the research agenda**

15. The revision of SEEA-2003 is undertaken with a view to maintaining the fundamental principles of the current system, keeping in mind users' demand and maintaining consistency with other macroeconomic statistical standards such as, the System of National Accounts, Balance of Payments Manual, Government Finance Statistics Manual, Monetary and Financial Statistics Manual, International Standard Classification of all Economic Activities, Central Product Classification, and so on. However, further development and standardization of classifications may be warranted. The revision process will also take into account the feasibility of implementing the guidelines without compromising international comparability. In addition, those issues with demonstrated policy relevance and well-advanced country practices, but for which no methodological consensus is expected, would also be included in part II, Non-standard accounts of the revised SEEA-2003.

### **(b) Governance arrangements**

16. The revision of SEEA-2003 involves many entities whose role and responsibilities are summarized below.

17. The Committee of Experts is the entity that, as delegated by the Statistical Commission, has the responsibility for the revision. The Committee manages and coordinates the revision process. In particular, it ensures appropriate inputs and outputs for the project, including funds and budget, agrees on desired outputs and outcomes according to an agreed timeline with the various technical expert groups working under its guidance, develops and ratifies the overall work plan, schedule and communications strategy. The Committee reports the progress of the revision of SEEA-2003, including progress of the various groups contributing to the revision, to the Statistical Commission, which in turn will be requested to adopt the revised SEEA-2003 as an international statistical standard.

18. City groups and other technical expert groups contribute to the revision of SEEA-2003 by identifying issues to be included in the research agenda for the

revision of SEEA-2003; solving those issues included in the agreed research agenda; and submitting recommendations for change to the Committee of Experts for its final decision. Specific tasks and responsibilities of the city groups and technical expert groups will be agreed with the Committee. Terms of reference for the tasks related to the revision project will be formulated with every relevant expert group and will include deliverables, timelines and a chair to monitor the discussions and to write the recommendations to be submitted to the Committee.

19. The Editor is responsible for drafting the text on the revised SEEA. He/she will be selected by the Committee of Experts from among internationally respected senior statisticians with recognized expertise in environmental-economic accounting and/or national accounts.

20. The secretariat provides logistical and administrative support to the project, including consulting countries, regional and other expert meetings and managing the project website. The United Nations Statistics Division is the secretariat of the project, a responsibility that stems from its role as permanent secretariat of the Committee of Experts.

21. The discussions of the project management framework of the revision of SEEA-2003 lead to a request by the Committee of Experts to develop a clear governance structure for the Committee itself. The proposed governance structure of the Committee will be available as a background document at the thirty-ninth session of the Statistical Commission.

22. The Committee of Experts agreed with the creation of a Bureau to assist the Chair of the Committee to carry out certain tasks under the delegated authority of the Committee. These tasks include reviewing the overall work plan, ensuring that activities and outputs are on track by monitoring progress of the tasks of city groups, technical expert groups and consultants; fund-raising and preparing the budget for the projects under the responsibility of the Committee, liaising with stakeholders, and so forth. The members of the Bureau will be elected from senior officials (heads of statistical offices or deputy heads) from national statistical offices and international organizations. The composition of the Bureau will be presented in the annex to the background document on governance structure of the Committee at the thirty-ninth session of the Statistical Commission.

**(c) Decision-making process and coordination**

23. The Committee of Experts takes decisions on the scope of the revision and on technical and conceptual issues. The Committee is responsible for ensuring coordination among various city groups and other technical expert groups. The list of issues to be considered for revision will be presented in a background document at the thirty-ninth session of the Statistical Commission.

24. To ensure country involvement and general transparency, all documents for discussion in the meetings of the Committee of Experts will be publicly accessible through its website. Those documents include preparatory papers, minutes of the meetings, and conclusions. After each meeting, conclusions on proposed changes to SEEA-2003 will be circulated to all United Nations member countries for review, with a 60-day response period. To ensure smooth progress, issues on which general agreement has emerged will not be further discussed, unless inconsistency with other decisions on other issues requires further deliberation.

**(d) Outline of the work programme for the project**

25. The final output of the project is the revised SEEA-2003. Intermediate outputs are recommendations of the technical expert groups and the Committee of Experts.

26. The timetable of the project is currently under discussion and its finalization will depend on the number of issues ultimately included in the research agenda. The Committee of Experts is considering the option of completing the revision in two stages: the first comprising the chapters that constitute the international statistical standard; the second comprising the chapters covering the accounts on which full consensus has not yet been reached and the applications.

27. The project will be financed by contributions in kind from members of the Committee of Experts and partly from a trust fund. The trust fund will mainly finance the participation of experts from the developing countries in the meetings of the Committee as well as in the meetings of city groups and other technical expert groups, the activities of the Editor, some consultancies and the electronic version and index of the revised SEEA-2003. Member States are encouraged to contribute to the trust fund to complement contributions by the international agencies.

**B. Coordination**

28. As mandated by the Statistical Commission, the Committee of Experts discussed the progress of activities carried out by city groups and other technical expert groups that fall within the Committee's purview. These include activities of the London Group on Environmental Accounting, the Oslo Group on Energy Statistics, the sub-group of the OECD Working Group on Environmental Information and Outlooks working on material flow accounts and the Intersecretariat Working Group on Environment Statistics.

**1. London Group on Environmental Accounting**

29. The London Group on Environmental Accounting met in Pretoria from 26 to 30 March 2007. At the meeting, the London Group agreed on a list of issues for the research agenda of the revision of SEEA-2003, on the general structure of the revised SEEA-2003 in three parts, developed a programme of work and assigned the task of addressing different issues on the research agenda to its members or sub-groups established for that purpose.

30. The next meeting of the London Group will take place in Rome from 17 to 19 December 2007. The meeting will discuss issues on the research agenda for the revision of SEEA-2003.

**2. Oslo Group on Energy Statistics**

31. The Oslo Group on Energy Statistics programme of work includes the drafting of international recommendations on energy statistics. The recommendations contain agreed definitions, classifications, data items, statistical units and compilation guidelines on energy statistics. In addition, it presents country practices and provides operational guidance on how to collect and compile energy statistics and energy balances.

32. The work of the Oslo Group on Energy Statistics and the London Group on Environmental Accounting presents many synergies, in particular concerning concepts, definitions and classifications. The Chairs of the two groups are working closely together to ensure proper coordination (see also para. 7 above).

### **3. OECD Working Group on Environment Information and Outlooks: work on material flow accounts**

33. The OECD work on material flows and resource productivity, including the preparation of a guidance document on the implementation and use of material flow accounts is undertaken in response to the OECD Council's recommendation of April 2004 on material flows and resource productivity. The guidance document was drafted by a team of experts under the auspices of the OECD Working Group on Environment Information and Outlooks and in cooperation with Eurostat. The guidance document is close to being finalized and will serve as a basis for the further development of related parts of the revised SEEA-2003.

### **4. Intersecretariat Working Group on Environment Statistics**

34. The Intersecretariat Working Group on Environment Statistics has focused its activities on water statistics. Its Sub-group has carried out a detailed comparison of classifications, terms and definitions used in the different water-related international data collection with the objective of harmonizing data collection with SEEA. The Sub-group's objective is to revise the questionnaires by harmonizing terms and definitions with SEEA.

35. The Intersecretariat Working Group is also working on a glossary of environment statistics and is developing a standard set of metadata for the exchange and dissemination of environment statistics. A new sub-group on land use and land cover statistics, to be led by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), will be established to harmonize the classifications of land use and land cover, to develop a core set of variables and to compile best practices for data collection.

### **5. Joint Working Group on Statistics for Sustainable Development**

36. The Joint Working Group on Statistics for Sustainable Development is a working group of OECD, Eurostat and the Conference of European Statisticians of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe with the objective of identifying a small set of sustainable development indicators that could be used for the purposes of international comparisons. The group will do this by investigating the commonalities among existing national and international sustainable development indicators sets and comparing them with the indicators that can be derived from a theoretical approach based on capital.

37. The Joint Working Group met in Geneva from 19 to 20 April 2007 and in Bucharest on 8 and 9 November 2007 to discuss its draft report entitled "Statistics for sustainable development: a framework for sustainable development indicators (SDI)". The draft report sets out the conceptual arguments for a capital-based set of sustainable development indicators and discusses the commonalities among existing national and international sets. It will recommend a small set of indicators that is coherent to the fullest extent possible with both. A draft version of the report will be submitted to the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians at its meeting

in February 2008. The final report will be submitted at the full session of the Conference of European Statisticians in June 2008.

### **C. Promotion and implementation**

38. The Committee of Experts has focused its work in the past year on technical and managerial issues mostly linked with the revision of SEEA-2003. This focus was necessary to ensure that the revision process is properly established. The Committee, however, is aware of its important role in promoting environmental-economic accounting in the users' community and in reacting to the strong policy demand in measures beyond gross domestic product to reflect the human impacts on the environment. The Committee, given its unique strategic mandate, has a role in demonstrating the contributions of official statistics to the international debate.

39. During the past year, and as part of its work programme on the promotion of environmental-economic accounts, the Committee of Experts has continued to update and expand its website; has undertaken phase II of the Global Assessment of Environment Statistics and Environmental-Economic Accounting for specific subjects; and has developed a strategy for the implementation of SEEAW. The latter two activities are discussed below.

#### **1. Progress of work of the Global Assessment of Environment Statistics and Environmental-Economic Accounting**

40. The Global Assessment of Environment Statistics and Environmental-Economic Accounting is an activity of the United Nations Statistics Division under the auspices of the Committee of Experts: (a) to assess the status of national implementation of environmental-economic accounting and related statistics; (b) to identify priorities and future plans in those areas; and (c) to assess the impeding factors in the collection, compilation and dissemination of environmental-economic accounting and related statistics. The Global Assessment contributes to the development of international standards and recommendations in environmental-economic accounting and related statistics as well as the development of targeted technical cooperation activities in those areas.

41. In order to reduce the burden on countries, the Global Assessment was designed in two phases. Phase I, carried out in cooperation with the Intersecretariat Working Group on Environment Statistics, covered general information on the programmes of environment statistics and environmental-economic accounting; phase II focuses on specific subject areas. Phase I of the Global Assessment was carried out in October 2006. The main conclusions of phase I of the Global Assessment were summarized in the report of the Secretary-General to the thirty-eighth session of the Statistical Commission (E/CN.3/2007/9) and a detailed report was presented as a background document to the Commission at the same session.

42. As part of phase II, the United Nations Statistics Division, in close cooperation with the Oslo Group on Energy Statistics, carried out the Global Assessment of Energy Statistics and Balances. The objectives of this assessment are: (a) to identify the role of national statistical offices in the national statistical system in collecting, compiling and disseminating energy statistics and energy balances; (b) to assess the scope of energy statistics and balances in countries by identifying the energy sources covered, data collection practices, the use of international guidelines and

classifications as well as the usage of the statistics provided; and (c) to assess the impeding factors in the collection, compilation and dissemination of energy statistics and energy balances. The assessment was dispatched in June 2007 to 210 countries and territories. As of 30 November 2007, 107 countries/territories have responded to the Global Assessment, which corresponds to a response rate of around 50 per cent. The detailed analysis of the Global Assessment of Energy Statistics and Balances will be presented in a background document at the thirty-ninth session of the Statistical Commission.

43. The Global Assessment of Energy Accounts and Air Emission Statistics and Accounts and the Global Assessment of Water Statistics and Accounts have been developed and have been launched in December 2007 to the countries that have indicated in phase I of the Global Assessment that they have a programme on the specific subject area and to those countries that have not replied to phase I.

## **2. Strategy for the implementation of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting for Water**

44. This implementation strategy has been prepared by the United Nations Statistics Division in response to the request by the Statistical Commission at its thirty-eighth session. The strategy is based on extensive consultation with countries and on drafts of the strategy that were discussed by the Committee of Experts and the London Group on Environmental Accounting as well as at six workshops or training programmes on water accounting held during 2007.

45. The strategy aims at integrating SEEAW into the national policy framework of integrated water resources management and with national statistical systems. It puts great emphasis on linking the implementation of water accounts to users' demand as well as more broadly into national economic policies. The United Nations Statistics Division is working in close collaboration with countries and international agencies building on synergies and existing programmes on integrated water resources management and statistical initiatives to improve water statistics programmes.

46. The implementation strategy comprises the following four components:

- (a) Development of international recommendations for water statistics, accompanied by guidelines on supplementary data collection and compilation;
- (b) Development of training and promotional material;
- (c) Development of a technical cooperation programme consisting of regional activities as well as pilot projects in selected countries in various regions;
- (d) Harmonization of international data collection activities with the SEEAW concepts and definitions.

### **(a) International recommendations for water statistics**

47. The United Nations Statistics Division is working on the development of international recommendations for water statistics. These will provide an agreed list of variables and agreed definitions on water statistics that countries are recommended to compile. The list of variables is fully harmonized with the variables of SEEAW but it is more detailed to cover additional variables related to water needed for sector-specific policies and analyses.

48. The international recommendations will be accompanied by practical guidelines, based on best practices, on how to collect and compile the variables as well as on how to populate the international questionnaires and the standard tables of SEEAW. The recommendations and supplementary guidelines are expected to be discussed at an expert group meeting in mid-2008.

**(b) Training and promotion**

49. In addition to SEEAW and the international recommendations for water statistics, there is a need to develop a promotion and training programme. While SEEAW has gained a foothold of acceptance in the official statistical community it needs to be promoted more broadly in the users' community. Following up on the outcome on the User-Producer Conference on Water Accounting for Integrated Water Resource Management, held in Voorburg, the Netherlands, from 22 to 24 May 2006, organized under the auspices of the Committee of Experts, the United Nations Statistics Division is working in close collaboration with the water community to raise awareness of SEEAW and its features as the information system for hydrological-economic information for integrated water resources management in the users' community.

50. Further, the Division is developing training modules to support the development and strengthening of water statistics programmes and the implementation of SEEAW, based on existing training material developed and used in international workshops and training by the Division. The presentations used in the training are available on the website of the Division.

51. Several activities are being undertaken by the Division in collaboration with various partners. The following are worth noting:

(a) Pilot programme on the implementation of SEEAW, in collaboration with the Global Water Partnership, the World Conservation Union (IUCN), Columbia University and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP);

(b) Training programme on SEEAW in collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organization-Institute for Water Education (UNESCO-IHE).

52. The United Nations Statistics Division is a member of the UN-Water Task Force on the monitoring and reporting of integrated water resources management. One of the objectives of the Task Force is to promote the use of SEEAW as the information system to develop outcome indicators for integrated water resources management. To that end, a pilot programme on the implementation of SEEAW in four countries will be launched in 2008 as a joint effort of the Global Water Partnership, Columbia University, IUCN, UNDP and the United Nations Statistics Division.

53. UNESCO-IHE carries out training programmes on integrated water resources management on a regular basis. At the invitation of UNESCO-IHE, the United Nations Statistics Division carried out a one-week training on SEEAW as part of the integrated water resources management training in September 2007. The training on SEEAW will again be conducted in 2008 and it is expected that it will become part of the regular curriculum of UNESCO-IHE. The 2008 course may be extended for a period longer than one week in order to better accommodate the diverse range of knowledge and experience of the attendees.

**(c) Technical assistance programme**

54. There is an increasing demand from countries to develop a technical assistance programme on water statistics and accounting. The United Nations Statistics Division has received official requests for technical assistance from approximately 50 countries following the adoption by the Statistical Commission at its thirty-eighth session of SEEAW as an interim international statistical standard. The 50 requests from countries represent a wide range of stages of development of water statistics and accounts and cover Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean.

55. The United Nations Statistics Division technical assistance programme on water statistics and accounting has a strong regional component and is built on close collaboration with the United Nations regional commissions and other international agencies active at the country level, in particular UNDP, the Division for Sustainable Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the World Bank and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). In addition, the United Nations Statistics Division is building a close cooperation with the Eurostat Regional Programme of Statistics in the Mediterranean Region, phase II (Medstat II), which has a component on water accounts, and with the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, which have recently been awarded a project for advancing environmental-economic accounting and statistics in their regions.

56. The technical assistance programme consists of regional workshops bringing together countries from the various regions of the world accompanied by technical assistance to pilot countries which should serve as examples for the region. The programme is designed in phases over a period of three years. It is briefly outlined below:

(a) *Phase I.* Introductory regional workshop aimed at raising awareness of SEEAW and getting support for implementation of SEEAW by senior government officials from both user and producer communities. The key aim of the workshop is to have countries understand the usefulness of SEEAW for integrated water resources management policies and commit to the implementation of SEEAW. The workshop will also provide information which will enable countries to begin work on pilot accounts. During this phase, one or two countries in the region would be selected as pilot case studies for the region on the basis of the countries' interest and the existence of suitable primary data, among other things;

(b) *Phase II.* Expert level workshops aimed at sharing experiences in the development of pilot accounts starting from existing information in countries and providing additional tools to assist the production of accounts. Training will be provided on the compilation of water statistics from existing sources as well as on how to populate the standard tables and responding to international questionnaires. A set of standard tables for the region could be developed taking into account common water concerns in the region and availability of data. The pilot country experience could be of help to other countries in the region starting on the implementation of SEEAW;

(c) *Phase III.* Countries will again share experiences in the development of the standard tables for the region so that best practices can be identified in the

compilation of the tables as well as more broadly in the development and enhancement of a water statistics programme.

57. In between workshops countries will be supported by the regional networks, electronic communication and knowledge platforms facilitated by the United Nations Statistics Division and other agencies active in the region.

58. Individual countries will be assisted with the development and strengthening of water statistics programmes as well as the implementation of SEEAW by the United Nations Statistics Division. Advice will be given mainly via e-mail and telephone. Because of resource constraints, only a limited number of country missions can be undertaken by the Division to assist with the implementation of SEEAW and in general will be restricted to pilot countries (see para. 56 above).

**(d) Harmonization of international data collection activities**

59. There are ongoing efforts to harmonize international data-collection activities with the SEEAW terms and definitions. International data-collection activities on water statistics consist of questionnaires conducted by the United Nations Statistics Division/UNEP and OECD/Eurostat, and FAO. The United Nations Statistics Division/UNEP and the OECD/Eurostat questionnaires are broadly consistent with SEEAW but some adjustments are still needed to fully align them with SEEAW terms and definitions. The FAO questionnaire is broadly consistent with SEEAW for the section that concerns water resources. For the section that concerns water use by the economy, the FAO questionnaire does not follow the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities. Efforts to harmonize the definitions of water statistics variables are under way by the Subgroup on Water Statistics of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Environment Statistics and also by the United Nations Statistics Division via the work on the international recommendations for water statistics.

60. The Division plans to harmonize its water statistics questionnaire with SEEAW starting from the next round of data-collection activities beginning in the spring 2008. It is working with Eurostat and OECD on that activity.